DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 202 075 CS 503 380

AUTHOR Hochel, Sandra
TITLE A Value Analysis of the 1980 Presidential Debate.
PUB DATE [80]
NOTE 12p.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Debate; Discourse Analysis; *Moral Values; *Persuasive Discourse; *Politics; Rhetorical Criticism; *Social Values; Speech Communication; Values
IDENTIFIERS Carter (Jimmy); *Presidential Campaigns; *Presidential Candidates; Reagan (Ronald)

ABSTRACT

Although Democrat Jimmy Carter and Republican Ronald Reagan appealed to many of the same basic American values in the 1980 presidential campaign debate, there were some subtle but major differences in their value appeals. Other than attempting to convince his audience that his policies had been and would be successful and that Reagan's policies would be disastrous, Carter's major persuasive emphasis was to convince his audience that Reagan was impractical and irresponsible. He linked the values of efficiency, practicality, and pragmatism with external conformity, the latter implying that Reagan would upset the tone of American society. Reagan also strongly appealed to the values of efficiency, practicality, pragmatism, achievement, and success, but external conformity was not his basic strategy. The major premises underlying Reagan's arguments were appeals to material comfort and Puritan and pioneer morality. He also appealed more strongly to Americans' aversion to governmental restraints. According to numerous public opinion polls, Reagan won the debate. It is possible that Reagan aimed his arguments at more salient values than did Carter, particularly material comfort and rejection of government authority. It is possible that Carter did more harm than good by appealing to external conformity before an audience that, while commonly accepting standards, still prizes individualism. (HTH)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED202075

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)

This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

A VALUE ANALYSIS OF THE 1980 PRESIDENTIAL DEBATE

Sandra Hochel

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Sandra Hochel

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

CS503380

Sandra Hochel

A VALUE ANALYSIS OF THE 1980 PRESIDENTIAL DEBATE

On October 28, 1980, the American public had a chance to see the Democratic and Republican presidential candidates in a face-to-face televised debate and to compare the two candidates. Much was at stake in the debate, and both candidates needed to have appealing persuasive arguments. For the 105 million people[1] who saw the debate between President Jimmy Carter and Governor Ronald Reagan, many differences in the candidates' positions on the issues were discernable, but differences in the major premises underlying their persuasive arguments were not so readily delineated. One way to examine any differences in the major premises is to analyze the values from which the two candidates argued. Rhetoricians have long known the importance of examining the values from which a speaker argues. For example, Edward Steele points out that the Aristotelian concept of the enthymeme as a form of logic is dependent upon commonly held values.[2] Steele and Redding write, "... it is possible to observe the functioning of such values as underpinning for persuasive, appealing arguments in speeches addressed to a mass audience."[3] In this paper the writer is interested in identifying the values to which Reagan and Carter appealed in the Presidential Debate, and in determining if there is a difference in the value appeals of the two candidates.

In order to identify and label the value appeals used by Carter and Reagan, a taxonomy of basic American values is needed. The writer selected the classification by Steele and Redding[4] although many other classifications exist.[5] All such lists are, of course, arbitrary, and most overlap to a considerable degree. The Steele and Redding classification seems well-suited to an analysis of political rhetoric, and most of the values listed by Steele and Redding are included in other taxonomies. The American

values are italicized as they appear in the analysis.

Value Appeals

According to the writer's analysis, the most frequent and obvious value appeal used by both Carter (18 instances) and Reagan (23) was to what Steele and Redding label achievement and success. As expected, both men repeatedly championed their own successes and discredited the efforts of the other. Carter, in particular, glowingly praised his own record using phrases such as, "very successful record," "unequal record," "remarkable success," and "a record never before achieved." Reagan primarily aimed his attack at Carter's "lack of success," but made seven references to his "successful" record as Governor of California.

The second most frequently used value appeal of Carter (18) and Reagan (15) was to efficiency practicality and pragmatism. Steele and Redding write that Americans value "... a practical man, a man of broad practical experience, a mature and competent man."[6] Reagan spent much of his time attempting to demonstrate that he was an experienced and competent politician and that his positions were reasoned and practical. For example, in supporting his opposition to the minimum wage, Reagan argued:

> I wish he (President Carter) could have been with me when I sat with a group of teenagers, who were black, and who were telling me about their unemployment problems, and that it was the minimum wage that had done away with jobs that they once could get. And, indeed, every time it is increased you will find that there is an increase in minority unemployment among young people. And therefore I have been in favor of a separate minimum for them.

Another example which is typical of Reagan's use of this value appeal

as a persuasive premise is found in his discussion of his opposition to the Equal Rights Amendment. He first explained why he was opposed: "I think the amendment will take this problem out of the hands of the elected legislators and put it in the hands of the unelected judges." He then went on to present his position as being both pragmatic and effective:

> I believe that if in all these years that we've spent trying to get the amendment that we'd spent as much time correcting these laws as we did in California - and we were the first to do it. If I were President I would also now take a look at the hundreds of Federal regulations which discriminate against women and which go right on while everyone is looking for an amendment.

As in the above example, Reagan frequently combined the value appeal of efficiency, practicality and pragmatism with that of success. He made frequent references to his experience as Governor of a state that "... would be the seventh-ranking economic power in the world...." if it were a nation. Thus while attempting to convince his audience that his positions were practical and reasonable, he repeatedly interjected his experience and "successful" record as Governor of California.

Carter also stressed his experience and his reasoned approach to serious problems, but, unlike Reagan, he repeatedly attacked his opponent as the antithesis of this. To describe himself and his policies, Carter used words like "steady," "carefully-planned," "methodical," "diplomatically," "moderation," and "thoughtfulness." He described Reagan and his position on issues as "disturbing," "dangerous," "radical," "ridiculous," "careless," "belligerent," and "irresponsible." The sociologist Robin Williams writes that the value appeal of practicality and efficiency "... rests on a whole set of implicit premises, among which are the stress on ... rationality."

And, indeed, Carter seemed to be implying that Reagan was not rational. For each question asked, Carter consistently tried to portray Reagan as a man who was not competent to make the difficult and serious decisions required of a president and as a man who held unreasonable positions. For example, when discussing Reagan's proposed policies to curb inflation, Carter mentioned Reagan's support of the "Reagan-Kemp-Roth proposal:"

> ... Which his own running mate, George Bush, described as voodoo economics and said that it would result in a 30 percent inflation rate, and Business Week, which is not a Democratic publication, said that this Reagan-Kemp-Roth proposal, and I quote them, I think, was completely irresponsible and would result in inflationary pressures which would destroy this nation.

Just as Reagan did, Carter frequently tied appeals to efficiency, practicality, and pragmatism with appeals to success. However, more significant is Carter's linking appeals to efficiency, practicality, and pragmatism with appeals to another value Steele and Redding label as external conformity. The combination of these two values was basic to Carter's persuasive strategy (8 instances). For not only were Reagan's positions impractical and unreasonable, but they would "... change the basic tone and commitment that our nation has experienced ever since the Second World War, with all Presidents, Democratic and Republican." For example, Carter pointed out Reagan was opposed to the Salt II treaty which was "... negotiated over a seven-year period, by myself and my two Republican predecessors." And, in spite of this, Carter maintained Reagan wished to: "... take this treaty, discard it, do not vote, do not debate, do not explore the issue, do not finally capitalize on this long negotiation - that is a very dangerous and disturbing thing." The following argument also exemplifies Carter's integration of these two value

appeals:

> I think habitually Governor Reagan has advocated the injection of military force into troubled areas when I and my predecessors, both Democratic and Republicans, have advocated resolving those troubles and those difficult areas of the world peacefully, diplomatically and through negotiation.

In discussing the Equal Rights Amendment, Carter spoke of Reagan's "... radical departure ... from the principles or ideals or historical perspective of his own party."

In contrast to Reagan's departure from tradition, Carter declared, "I consider myself in the mainstream of my party. I consider myself in the mainstream even of the bipartisan list of Presidents who served before me." In addition, Carter frequently mentioned the traditions of the Democratic party and that he intended to carry on those traditions.

The value appeal of external conformity was not as important for Reagan's over-all debate strategy as it was for Carter's, but in seven instances Reagan used arguments based on external conformity when he refuted Carter's attack on his "radical departure" from American ideals. For example, Reagan declared that he did not block the Salt II treaty as Carter had said, but that the Senate, with a Democratic majority, had blocked it. When discussing the Equal Rights Amendment, Reagan noted that in four years not one state, most with Democratic legislators, had ratified the Amendment. Thus Reagan argued that his positions were not inconsistent with those of other American leaders.

Another significant value appeal used by Reagan (12) and, to a much lesser extend, by Carter (5) was material comfort. As expected, each candidate argued that his policies would reduce inflation and that the opponent's policies would be or had been disastrous. Also, as expected, Reagan had

more arguments that appealed to material comfort than Carter did. For example, Reagan talked about the "misery index," "the 56 percent unemployment in Detroit," and the President's plan to increase taxes. Perhaps Reagan's most memorable and effective appeal to this value was when he said:

> Next Tuesday all of you will ... stand there in the polling place and make a decision. I think when you make that decision it might be well if you would ask yourself: Are you better off than you were four years ago? Is it easier for you to go and buy things in the stores than it was four years ago? Is there more or less unemployment in the country than there was four years ago?

One significant value appeal used by Reagan (13) but not Carter (1) was rejection of authority. For example, Reagan discussed the "... unnecessary regulations that invade every facet of business and ... our personal lives" as a major reason for the energy shortage. When mentioning past tax increases he said the Carter administration had taken "... so much money away from the people." The government had "... usurped power and autonomy and authority." Reagan linked this value appeal to success when he mentioned that as governor he gave back "... authority and autonomy to the people" and opposed government intrusion. The following closing argument by Reagan combined the value appeals of rejection of authority and patriotism:

> I would like to have a crusade today. And I would like to lead that crusade with your help. And it would be one to take government off the backs of the great people of this country and turn you loose again to do those things that I know you can do so well, because you did them and made the country great.

Reagan also had more arguments (12) which appealed to Puritan and

pioneer morality than Carter did (2). For example, Reagan spoke of the "unkept promises" of Carter and affirmed that he intended to keep his promises. Reagan accused Carter of unfairly blaming the OPEC countries for inflation and of unfairly indicting the American people of living too well. Reagan strongly implied that Carter was not being honest and truthful with the American public. He also accused Carter of not telling the truth about his (Reagan's) record. Another example of Reagan's affirmation of Puritan and pioneer morality was when he indicted Carter's human rights policy as "hypocritical." Carter, in turn, had only two arguments based on this value which concerned "fair play" and "a just and fair society."

Carter and Reagan used other value appeals but these appeals were less frequent and, in the opinion of the writer, not significantly different. Both candidates made appeals to the importance of change and progress, and both emphasized the value of effort and optimism. Both were for equal opportunity and affirmed the value of the individual and the importance of generosity and considerateness. And, as expected, both used arguments that appealed to the audience's patriotism.

Summary

Both men appealed to many of the same basic American values, yet some major differences in the value appeals of the candidates are evident. Other than attempting to convince his audience that his policies had been and would be successful and that Reagan's policies would be disastrous, Carter's major persuasive emphasis was to convince his viewers that Reagan was impractical and irresponsible. Carter used strong language, even for a political debate, in portraying Reagan as a trigger happy, inexperienced, and irresponsible maverick. Carter's linking efficiency, practicality, and pragmatism to external conformity in his persuasive arguments was also basic to his per-

suasive strategy.

Reagan also strongly appealed to the values of achievement and success and efficiency, practicality and pragmatism, but appeals to external conformity were not basic to his persuasive strategy. However, Reagan used appeals to material comfort and Puritan and pioneer morality as a major premise underlying more of his arguments than Carter did. One other major difference is that Reagan appealed more strongly than Carter did to Americans' aversion to governmental restraints.

Discussion

According to numerous public opinion polls, Reagan came away the victor among the voters who watched the debate.[7] Although this analysis was not intended to provide an answer to why Reagan was successful, it should shed some light on the outcome. It is possible that Reagan aimed his arguments at values that were more salient to the majority of viewers. The psychologist Milton Rokeach maintains that the importance of values varies in different situations. He writes that we have a "... hierarchically organized system, wherein each value is ordered in priority or importance relative to others."[8] It is likely the audience identified more strongly with Reagan's appeals to material comfort, rejection of authority, and Puritan and pioneer morality than to Carter's primary appeals. In particular, Reagan's appeals were probably more salient than Carter's appeal to external conformity. Although our society has many commonly accepted standards, conformity to the standards has limits because Americans also value individualism.[9] Robin Williams writes, "... conformity can be treated as a value only in so far as sheer adherence to group patterns is actually divorced from the content and implication of those patterns."[10] Thus it is possible that Carter did more harm than good when he used this value as a premise for his arguments.

Many viewers may have believed that it was time that a President go against the actions of his predecessors as long as this action could be taken in a responsible manner. Since the majority of viewers believed Reagan won the debate, Carter was evidently not able to persuade most viewers that Reagan was irresponsible or impractical. Indeed, it appears that Reagan successfully used basic and salient American values for the major premises of his persuasive arguments.

NOTES

[1]"The Great Homestretch Debate," Newsweek, 10 Nov. 1980, p. 34.

[2]Edward D. Steele, "Social Values, the Enthymeme, and Speech Criticism," Western Speech, 26 (Spring 1962), 70-75.

[3]Edward D. Steele and W. Charles Redding, "The American Value System: Premises for Persuasion," Western Speech, 26 (Spring 1962), 84.

[4]Steele and Redding, pp. 83-91.

[5]See, for example, Milton Rokeach, The Nature of Human Values (New York: The Free Press, 1973), p. 28; Robin Williams, American Society: A Sociological Interpretation (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1967), 415-470; and Clyde Kluckhohn, "Values and Value-Orientation in the Theory of Action: An Exploration in Definition and Classification," in Toward a General Theory of Action, ed. Talcott Parsons and Edward Shils (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard Univ. Press, 1951), pp. 388-433.

[6]Steele and Redding, p. 88.

[7]Newsweek, 10 Nov. 1980, pp. 34-37.

[8]Rokeach, p. 6.

[9]Williams, p. 451.

[10]Williams, p. 452.